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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a theoretical concept of evaluation which can be utilized by classroom teachers at any level in evaluating teacher education programs in reading. The following theoretical requirements (questions) necessary to develop an evaluation plan for the improvement of teacher education programs in reading are discussed: (a) What are your beliefs at present about reading? and What do you value? (b) What environmental situations exist at present? and What is reality? (c) What types of decisions do you want to make this year or this semester? (d) What alternatives are open to you? (e) What information needs do you have in regard to your decisions? (f) How and when will you collect information? and (g) How will you use the information? These questions may be used to develop, implement, and evaluate teacher education programs in reading or to develop a basic evaluation design. A seven-item bibliography is included. (Author/PD)

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EVALUATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN READING

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Evaluation is the collection of information to serve as a guide for educators to make instructional as well as other types of decisions for the ongoing development and implementation of teacher education programs (Stufflebeam, 1969, 1970, 1971; Guba, 1969, 1970; Scriven, 1967; Stake, 1967, 1969, 1972). According to Webster;s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, evaluation means to "determine or fix the value of". Therefore, what you value in reading individually or as a group of individuals who are developing, implementing, and evaluating teacher education programs will determine to a large extent the program that results. All too often this belief system (what you or we value) is given very little attention. We either pick up a textbook and assign chapters week-by-week without time to consider what our beliefs are; we use the same tests each year without knowing what we wanted to test and for what purpose we wanted to use them in the program; or we use the same program thrust (monetarily, resource wise, and instructionally) year after year. We operate by intuition, experience or armchair decision making (Roser, 1970). However, research has shown that ongoing evaluation is a more useful and rational guide to making instructional and program decisions (Farr, et al., 1971, 1972; Griffin, 1973).

Because this is true this paper deals with seven theoretical requirements that seem essential to evaluation or "the act of valuing". This should assist any planner in developing, implementing and evaluating a teacher education program in reading.

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Evaluation Questions

To use evaluation as a process of collecting information for making more rational decisions based upon what you value, you need to answer the following seven questions:

1. What are your beliefs at present in reading? What do you value?
2. What environmental situations exist at present? What is reality?
3. What types of decisions do you want to make this year or this semester?
4. What alternatives are open to you?
5. What information needs do you want in regard to your decisions?
6. How and when will you collect information?
7. How will you use the information?

The answers to these questions will result in an evaluation plan (design) that can be used as a guide for the evaluation of teacher education programs in reading at any educational level, (national, state, local, school or individual classroom). Answering the above questions and developing an evaluation plan are not easy jobs, but the answers form a continuing basis for developing more adequate programs. In short, this type of evaluation is stating beliefs: knowing the environmental situation thoroughly; formulating decisions such as instructional ones which would include determining goals and procedures, materials, organizational patterns to meet those goals; knowing all alternatives (limits - choices) you have; collecting data; and systematically modifying a program based on the above. It is cyclical in nature as well as ongoing.

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1. WHAT ARE YOUR BELIEFS AT PRESENT ABOUT READING? WHAT DO YOU VALUE?

This should be your initial step in developing an evaluation plan. For an individual or a team of individuals to begin developing a basic evaluation plan, they must come to terms with values. This may come from many sources such as 1) the experiences of persons implementing the program; 2) backgrounds and experiences of lay and professional people within the field who seem important for program development and implementation; 3) expert opinion of personnel in the areas you deem important from cities, colleges, schools, universities throughout the area and country. Some of these may include knowledge from personnel in national and state government funding agencies, school board and public support, etc,; and 4) other outside sources including published literature and the most recent research data. What you believe as an individual or team of individuals is your guide to action. In this case, what you believe about reading and reading instruction should be seriously discussed and written down (described) initially as well as during the semester or year of program development, implementation, and evaluation. It is the most crucial, and perhaps the most difficult, of the evaluation requirements.

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2. WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATIONS EXIST AT PRESENT? WHAT IS REALITY?

What are the reading expectations, demands, attitudes and needs of the child, parents, teachers, principals, coordinators-consultants, superintendents, school boards, colleges and universities, state, and nation? What really is reality for you in the development, implementation, and evaluation of your teacher education program? Before you can state any type of decision you want to make (answer any question) you must take into consideration and describe your environmental situation, i.e. the personnel who will work with you, the cost, the demands placed on you from government funding or otherwise, physical resources, etc. Market analysis and needs assessment for predictive purposes before you even start your teacher education programs in reading have often been nonexistent, thus, leading to the status quo. Suddenly you find yourself in "big business" without all the knowledge and skill necessary to keep your head above water. Thousands of dollars which have been available and allotted over the past several years seem to have been wasted for this reason. Now funding is becoming less and less. How can we use the monies allotted more effectively is a critical question in the development of teacher education programs in reading? Hopefully, those programs that can justify their existence through adequate evaluation will continue and the rest will fall by the wayside. Money should follow the adequacy and appropriateness of a teacher education program in reading.

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3. WHAT TYPES OF DECISIONS DO YOU WANT TO MAKE THIS YEAR OR THIS SEMESTER?

There are 4 types of decisions that will be discussed briefly (Guba and Stufflebeam, 1970); 1) intended ends - goals; 2) intended means - procedures, methods; 3) carrying through the action plan - implementation; and 4) extent to which goals are being and/or have been attained.

1) Intended ends - goals in reading serve as your guide to action and are based on what you value (your belief in reading) and the environmental situation. What are your program goals, your present mission, top priority in training reading teachers? 2) The means to attain these goals are the selected procedures, materials, organizational patterns, personnel, schedule, facilities, money, etc. that can be utilized based on the limitations of reality. In actuality, the above question means: based on your beliefs about reading and reading instruction, what do you want to teach, when, how, with what materials, organizational patterns, personnel, time, facilities, and money. Why? Your goals should relate directly to your beliefs and the environmental situation (reality). The goals for preparing teachers of reading should also consider the demands placed on reading teachers. What do teachers of reading do? What do teacher trainers think they need to do? What do teachers think they should know and do to be able to teach reading? Those responsibile for the development, implementation, and evaluation of teacher education programs should constantly study these and similar questions. 3) Implementing decisions result in asking yourself questions such as the following during the ongoing process of the

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program: Should the staff be retrained? Should the goals be modified? Should new procedures be instituted? Should additional resources be sought? Should staff responsibilities change? Should modification be made in the schedule, etc.? This is really the day-to-day operation of the program. 4) The last - the extent to which goals have been attained - touches on evaluation which should occur continuously during program operation. Questions which would evolve would be: Are the students' needs being met? Are problems being solved as intended? Is the program failing? Was the outcome worth the investment? Has sufficient progress been achieved to warrant continuation of the program, etc.?

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4. WHAT ALTERNATIVES ARE OPEN TO YOU?

Based on what you value, the environmental situation, and what you want your teacher education program in reading to be, you must determine available alternatives for meeting the decisions you have tentatively made. These alternatives are controlled by the personnel with whom you work, your school, school system, state, or nation. Every decision you make has some type of limitation. 1) Your intended goals depend on the amount of information you have to make them based on knowledge of reading and the environment. 2) Your means to attain your goals have limits in terms of procedures, materials, organizational patterns, personnel, facilities, schedule and money; 3) Implementation with constant feedback to change during a program operation takes time, willingness, and open-mindedness on the part of all personnel; 4) Attainment of goals takes the same strength as number 3 with the objectivity to look at program and try to make valid decisions in terms of continuing, modifying or discontinuing. The alternatives are really your choices -- the limits of your situation. They limit the full implementation of your goals just as your belief system limits full accomplishment of your goals, but that is reality. No one can do more than his/her values allow or more than he/she is willing to learn and to modify. The necessities of 1) interrelationships among values, environment, goals, and alternatives and 2) personal willingness to search for alternatives to means of attainment which will assist in modification of goals and means based on values and reality cannot be over emphasized. If a program planner or planners are not open to modification or to search and extension of alternatives, the program remains the same, and he/she has forfeited the goal of continuously improving teacher education programs in reading.

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5. WHAT INFORMATION NEEDS DO YOU HAVE IN REGARD TO YOUR DECISIONS?

What do you want to know about your goals? How well you met them? Should you continue them? Should they be modified partially or completely?

What do you want to know about the means of attainment of these goals such as selected procedures, materials, organizational patterns, personnel, time, facilities, money, etc. Major question could include: Are each related specifically to my goals? Do I have enough personnel to do the job? Too little personnel to do the job? Is the time allotment appropriate? What about facilities? What about money? Have I used my money most effectively to implement a teacher education program in reading. Have the procedures I've selected been appropriate or should they be altered to meet the same goal? What types of materials do I really need, presently have available? How can I spend money most effeciently on materials? What organizational patterns work most effectively with my teacher education program. These are but a few of many questions you may ask about each decision to get at information needs necessary to begin to select appropriate ways of evaluating a teacher education program in reading. This step sets the stage for planning evaluation.

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6. HOW AND WHEN WILL YOU COLLECT INFORMATION?

As was mentioned initially, evaluation is a continuous process of collecting information to serve as a guide for educators making decisions for the ongoing development and implementation of teacher education programs in reading. Evaluation, in proper prospective, is set up as the sixth theoretical requirement in the procedure for developing an evaluation plan. Notice that no decision in regard to how and when to collect information is made before serious consideration is given to beliefs, environmental situations, goals, alternatives, and information needs. These set the framework for the development of an evaluation plan which will assist in the development of more valid data collection methods that produce information to answer initial decisions.

Stake (1972) uses a term which seems to fit the theoretical position we are trying to make; it is termed "responsive evaluation". Responsive evaluation focuses on all the activities going on within a program to see "how it ticks". The evaluator observes and records what is happening and at the same time finds out what within the program is of value to the program implementers. He states that the first duty of any evaluator is to offer program implementers a comprehensive portrayal of the program. The usual way of evaluating educational programs is to 1) state goals; 2) use objective standardized normed tests; 3) check gain by comparing our sample to the norm; 4) use standards held by program personnel; and 5) report in "research-type" reports. Stake sees "responsive evaluation as what people do naturally in evaluating things - observe,

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record, and react. He would like to build a technology around this natural behavior trying to overcome its defects in sampling errors and find ways to authenticate the "less scientific" way of reporting. We buy this type evaluation. It improves communication with personnel and is based on direct experience in a realistic setting. It seems to make more sense in educational decision making.

Rinehard (1973) suggests that advocate teams - groups of people to help create and select alternatives to program decisions are very successful in helping program implementers improve teacher education programs in reading.

Sometimes the implementers of programs become so involved in what they are doing that they need outside help in creativity. In a monograph to be published by the National Council of Teachers of English on Reading Assessment and Instructional Decision Making by Richard E. Venezky (1974) ten "canons" are presented in which he relates assessment to decisions which are made in the selection, implementation, and evaluation of reading program. Some of these "canons" that blend with our position are the following:

1. Streamline evaluation. If there are no decisions to be made, there is no need to assess. The need for the decision must be established before the assessment is done.

2. Vaildity of assessment is critical. The content of assessment should be compatible with the content of each decision and information need for that decision.

3. Work toward precision in assessment. "Cruder" assessments may be better to assess instructional needs in reading than standardized survey and diagnostic tests in reading. A norm grade equivalent doesn't give a

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> teacher much to make instructional decisions for reading. Schools seriously concerned about quality reading programs will expend the resources required to develop the kind of program which will best fit the needs of the students and the abilities and resources of the teaching staff and community. Selection of assessment comes AFTER decisions on what to teach and with what materials, etc. Instruction can never be based on a certain test. A test can never furnish information required for building a successful reading program by itself.

This may be a new view of evaluation for many of you - much broader in scope than familiar testing procedures. It takes more time this way than to pick up a test and probably find out invalid information for making program decisions. However, we think it is a more rational and realistic guide to decision making. This type evaluation should occur before, initially, during and after the teacher education program in reading. Only in that way do you have a continuous, cyclical process.

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7. HOW WILL YOU USE THE INFORMATION?

Use of the information is a thoughtful activity which utilizes the experiences and insights of creative program planners. It is based on beliefs, reality, goals, procedures, materials, and organization to meet those goals, facilities, personnel, cost, alternatives and information needs for each, data collection methods, results, and modification of all of these as a result of collected information. The most common error in beginning stages of evaluation is making the most obvious decision indicated by the collected information. For example, if students rate a particular activity as poor, the most obvious decision is to drop it. However, instead it may be useful to consider ways to improve the activity, because further data collection might indicate that this is the only possible activity to help students meet a particular goal.

It is very important for a program planner or instructor to realize what he/she does or does not control. Either will be more effective if other people (e.g. lay professionals, parents, students, etc.) are given power to control factors which play a part in their learning. Other people like to exercise some control, but they also want the program planners to know what will exist in their learning. It is helpful to strive for a happy balance.

Venezky (1974) states that assessment results should be limited to those prepared to use them in decision making. All data irrelevant to decision making for the program should be discarded. Also, the form in which assessment results are reported should be determined by the decisions

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which they are to aid. Decisions need to be made in who needs help in what. Reporting of class averages, percentage scores is somewhat superfluous and misleading. A teacher education program in reading never ends. The process of assessment must, at the same time it produces a product, also provide data which can be used to improve the process itself. To say it very simply. To continuously evaluate teacher education programs in reading one must have a thorough understanding of what the program is including all its components, be adaptable to changes in children's backgrounds and interests, and continually monitor over time so that everyone can be adaptable to change. Change isn't a quick procedure. And don't forget, it is so important to know at what cost a teacher education program was effective. In other words, don't put all your eggs in one basket and expect them to transfer throughout the school system, district or nation. Also, the success of any program takes more time than many federal funding agencies will allow. We must report "gain" scores from standardized tests on a yearly basis. But to make such decisions as to continue or not continue funding on the basis of only assessment scores such as norm and gain scores is not sufficient. These results must be evaluated in relation to a set of realistic expectencies, and it is in the setting of these expectencies or goals for a program that extreme difficulty is encountered. We really don't know what a successful program in reading should or must contain, how much effort is required to implement it, and what results should be expected from it. We must ask ourselves whether or not the goals which the program attempted to reach were realistic for the time period

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allowed.

Set realistic expectations and assess as needed realizing that "progress" however you define it to be is slow. Also, strive to a more natural life-like way of evaluating - less "scientific" perhaps, but more responsive to the understanding of a teacher education program in reading and the needs of a particular set of people.

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